

# NPT Review Conference 2022

## Background information for media

### What is the NPT Review Conference?

The tenth review conference of the [Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons \(NPT\)](#) will be held at the United Nations in New York from 1 to 26 August 2022. This will be the first meeting of the 191 states parties to discuss taking forward their disarmament and nonproliferation obligations since 2015. NPT review conferences are usually held every five years, but this conference has been postponed since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The NPT is widely regarded as the “cornerstone” of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. The treaty prohibits its 186 non-nuclear-weapon states parties from ever acquiring nuclear weapons, while obliging its five nuclear-weapon states parties (China, France, Russia, UK, USA) to pursue nuclear disarmament. (The other four nuclear-armed states - India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea - are not members of the NPT.) However, the NPT does not outlaw nuclear weapons nor prohibit the use of nuclear weapons. It also does not provide any timelines for when the nuclear armed states are to achieve nuclear disarmament. States parties have failed to adopt a new plan for its implementation for more than a decade.

### Why is this meeting important right now?

Seven years after the previous NPT review conference failed to adopt an outcome document or agree on any actions to advance the implementation of the treaty, the 2022 review conference will be held in even more challenging and dangerous circumstances. But there’s also a new, emerging counter movement taking place. The NPT meeting follows the [successful adoption](#) in June of the Vienna Declaration condemning nuclear threats and the Vienna Action Plan, a concrete plan of 50 actions to implement the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the only treaty banning nuclear weapons, by states parties to that treaty.

### Here’s the bad news:

- One of the five nuclear-weapon states of the NPT and depositary of the treaty (Russia) has invaded a NPT non-nuclear-weapon state (Ukraine), and has threatened to use nuclear weapons against anyone intervening in the conflict. These actions have fractured the NPT community, heightened the risks of nuclear weapons being used, and increased the likelihood of nuclear proliferation.

- Of the nuclear-armed states in this treaty, China and Russia are increasing their arsenals, and the United Kingdom has raised the cap on the maximum number of warheads by 40%. All nuclear-armed countries are massively investing in their nuclear arsenals, to the tune of [\\$82 billion](#) in 2021 alone, including building new and more dangerous weapons systems.
- None of the approximately 35 states that allow the use of nuclear weapons on their behalf (so called “nuclear umbrella” states) has implemented the commitments to reduce their reliance on nuclear weapons. Three additional states - Belarus, Sweden and Finland - have instead increased their support for nuclear weapons, through Belarus offering to host Russian nuclear weapons and removing its nuclear weapons free status from its constitution, and Sweden and Finland stating publicly as part of their NATO membership application that they now support nuclear weapons as a crucial part of their security policy and would be willing to participate in using these weapons of mass destruction.
- These developments are damaging the NPT regime and undermining its credibility. The risk of the use of nuclear weapons is growing, and proliferation pressures are rising as non-nuclear-weapon states confront the reality of aggression and threats by nuclear-armed states.
- If Russia or any other nuclear-armed state, assisted by its allies, would use nuclear weapons, it would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would impact the whole world. Given the size of today’s nuclear arsenals, any use of nuclear weapons would inflict immense and unprecedented destruction, death and displacement, as well as profound long-term damage to the environment, socioeconomic development, the global economy, food security and the health of current and future generations.

**Here’s the good news:**

- Fortunately, a large number of countries are developing an international legal response to these negative developments. Since the last NPT Review Conference, an international community of states have negotiated, adopted and brought into force the [2017 UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons \(TPNW\)](#).
- Over 90 states have either signed or ratified the Treaty that prohibits nuclear weapons. This will likely be the largest group of states in the NPT with a common agenda, and is expected to grow over the coming months.
- In June 2022 at the first [Meeting of States Parties](#) to the TPNW, these states issued the strongest multilateral statement ever against nuclear threats, [condemned](#) “unequivocally any and all nuclear threats, whether they be explicit or implicit and irrespective of the circumstances”.

- The states parties adopted and began to implement a [50-point action plan](#) to take forward the objectives of the TPNW, thereby taking the lead on the implementation of the NPT and setting the pace and a model for how to move around blocking countries at the United Nations.
- Through the TPNW, these states are taking groundbreaking action to address the harm caused by the use and testing of nuclear weapons. The Vienna Action Plan contains concrete steps to set up processes and work on victim assistance and environmental remediation which will help communities around the world that are suffering from the long-term impact of nuclear testing.

## **Key issues to watch out for**

### **1. Will the conference condemn or legitimize threats to use nuclear weapons?**

Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine under the threat of using nuclear weapons puts enormous pressure on the credibility of the NPT regime. For decades the NPT nuclear armed states have offered security assurances to non-nuclear weapon states, including through UN Security Council Resolutions ([255](#), [984](#)) in order to encourage these states to remain non-nuclear armed. Russia's threats to use nuclear weapons in order to enable an illegal invasion of a non nuclear armed state raises concerns for non-nuclear weapon states about the NPT's ability to protect them, and a key issue of debate will be how the NPT will respond to threats to use nuclear weapons.

In June, the 65 states parties of the TPNW adopted the [Vienna Declaration](#), issuing the strongest statement against nuclear weapons in a multilateral setting, and unequivocally condemned threats to use nuclear weapons. But Russia, China, the United States, the United Kingdom, France and many of the NATO states will be reluctant to condemn threats to use nuclear weapons as they rely on the potential use of nuclear weapons as part of their nuclear deterrence policies. Will the Western nuclear armed and allied governments choose to defend nuclear weapons over criticizing Russia, or will they join the TPNW member states in condemning nuclear threats?

If the NPT Review Conference outcome document is silent on the issue of nuclear threats, it will be a strong signal to non-nuclear weapon states that this treaty will not protect them from nuclear threats by the nuclear armed states. This could significantly undermine support for the Treaty.

### **2. How will the conference deal with the entry into force of the TPNW?**

Despite the current challenging geopolitical context where a non-nuclear weapon state has been invaded under the threat of using nuclear weapons, the majority of UN members has negotiated, adopted and brought into force a global prohibition of nuclear weapons since the last NPT Review Conference. This is not only a concrete implementation of the NPT's legal obligations (Article VI) but also the only advance in international law in the last few years in the arms control and disarmament field.

Feeling threatened by the TPNW's normative impact, the nuclear-weapon states will unify in attempting to delete all references to the new international prohibition of nuclear weapons. This tension between those pursuing in good faith their obligation to pursue disarmament under the NPT through the TPNW and the nuclear-weapon states' efforts to stall any progress towards disarmament including by opposing the TPNW could be a point of contention at the Review Conference.

### **3. Removing references to evidence-based humanitarian impacts of the use of nuclear weapons**

There is a wide consensus amongst scientists, the United Nations membership, humanitarian organisations and emergency responders, and experts that any use of nuclear weapons will have unprecedented and devastating humanitarian consequences that cannot be adequately addressed by any state or group of states. These consequences will transcend national borders, and pose grave risks for humanity.

The last agreed document of the NPT in 2010, expressed "*its deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and reaffirm[ed] the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law.*"

Since that time the scientific and evidence-based discussion on the consequences of nuclear use progressed at international meetings held by Norway, Mexico and Austria and eventually led to political decisions by the majority of governments at the United Nations to prohibit nuclear weapons through the TPNW.

Since these references to the impact of nuclear weapons spurred the majority of governments to act to ban these weapons after the 2010 NPT Review Conference, the nuclear armed states have started to oppose and block any such references.

As the risk of nuclear weapons is increasing and global tensions between nuclear armed states are at an all time high, the vast majority of governments, international organisations like the United Nations and the ICRC, scientists and impacted communities will continue to highlight the evidence-based consequences of nuclear weapons use and the lack of global preparedness and ability to handle such catastrophe. But the five nuclear weapon states and many of their nuclear allies are likely to dismiss and aim to block any references to such concerns as well the scientific evidence about the consequences and indiscriminate impact of nuclear weapons use, in order to stall the much needed action.

#### **Who are the key actors to watch at the NPT:**

The nuclear-weapon states: Russia, United States, France, United Kingdom and China.

New nuclear weapons supporting countries: Belarus, Sweden and Finland.

The TPNW leading countries: Austria, Mexico, South Africa, Brazil, Indonesia, New Zealand, and Ireland.

Governments and civil society actors who have been impacted by nuclear weapons use, testing or threats: Japan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Algeria and Ukraine.

### **Facts about the TPNW**

- Negotiated and adopted by 122 UN member states in 2017
- ICAN's work to achieve the Treaty was awarded with the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize
- Entered into force and became international law in January 2021, 90 days after 50 states had ratified it.
- Currently 66 states parties and 86 signatories. More are expected to sign at the UN General Assembly in September.

### **Practical information for the media**

Information for the media wishing to cover the review conference, including accreditation requirements, is available here:

<https://www.un.org/en/conferences/npt2020/media-center-and-news>

#### *Available for interview*

ICAN is happy to arrange access to and interviews with scientific and technical experts, survivors of the use and testing of nuclear weapons, national and international campaigners, and representatives of states parties to the TPNW.

ICAN representatives, including Executive Director Beatrice Fihn, Policy and Research Coordinator Alicia Sanders-Zakre and UN Liaison Seth Sheldon, will be attending the conference and available for interview throughout.

**Contact to arrange interviews:** [press@icanw.org](mailto:press@icanw.org)

### **Further information and documentation**

#### About the review conference

Official website: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/npt2020>

Current and historical documentation: <https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/npt>

#### About the NPT

<https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/npt/>

[https://www.icanw.org/npt\\_compliance\\_papers\\_2022](https://www.icanw.org/npt_compliance_papers_2022)

About the TPNW

<https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/>

[https://www.icanw.org/the\\_treaty](https://www.icanw.org/the_treaty)

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